

Information Management in Museums – How knowledge, information and records fit together

Knowledge is a unique asset that drives all museum work, and comprises the institutional memory and expertise held by museum staff that develops over time - which can be difficult to replace. What we know about objects and collections is only the tip of the iceberg; underpinning and surrounding this is a larger network of knowledge about other business functions, which needs to be managed equally carefully in order to protect and enhance the museum and its collections.

Knowledge can be *tacit* (held in a person's mind and used without conscious effort) or explicit (readily shared in an intangible or verbal form), and can also move between these two states. Knowledge can be created and built on through research and innovation.

Knowledge Management is a range of strategies and practices to document, preserve and share knowledge within organisations.

Knowledge in a museum might include:

- unwritten understanding of the collections
- specialist buildings and facilities expertise
- understanding about different museum audiences

Information is captured and interpreted to add to knowledge

Information is produced through processing, manipulating and organising data to answer questions, adding to the receiver's knowledge and understanding.¹

Information Management comprises the processes and strategies used to create, capture and use information in an organisation.²

Information in a museum might include:

- entries in a collections management system
- equipment manuals and repair logs
- blog posts and other web-based information feeds

Information is found both within and outside official records

Records are documents which provide evidence of a transaction, activity, decision or event. There may be legal or business requirements to preserve some records over the longterm.

Records Management is a set of tools, activities and guidelines to manage the creation, access and use, storage, preservation and disposal of records.

Records in a museum might include:

- correspondence about object acquisitions
- contracts with maintenance companies
- minutes of discussions about using social media

Visit www.museuminfo-records.org.uk for more detailed guidance on Information Management and Records Management in museums, interactive training and other resources to adapt and use in your museum free of charge.

¹HM Government, *Information matters: building government's capability in managing knowledge and information*, 2008.
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-matters-strategy.pdf>

²Ibid